# The Last CHEAP TRUTH

*"NODE ZERO" DEMOLISHED! Omniaveritas Shot!*

(Austin, Texas November 1986) "Node Zero," the global info-nexus of the CHEAP TRUTH publishing empire, has been reduced to smoldering wreckage in a poorly-realized action-sequence right out of the worst tradition of macho adventure fiction.

A dead Hollywood stunt-dummy, with several burst squibs of chicken-blood attached to its head and torso, was discovered by hard-boiled investigators. The body has been identified as that of CHEAP TRUTH editor Vincent Omniaveritas.

Credit for the attack was immediately claimed in phone-calls to a fictional news service where guys wear snap-brim hats that say "press" and have teletypes that go clackaclackaclacka. We are reprinting the statements in their entirety.

(Version 1) "This is the voice of the Skiffy Defense Initiative. On November 26, 1986, our armed counterterrorist strike force received authorization from the National Security Council, or guys who looked and acted just like them, to surround the CHEAP TRUTH terrorist cell and neutralize them by any means necessary.

"A leak in the Marxist publication ROLLING STONE allowed us at last to establish irrefutable proof of linkage between CHEAP TRUTH's activities and the blustering madman known as the "Qaddafi of Technosleaze." At the modest cost of half a billion dollars, an attack was launched in a healthy condition of total press secrecy.

"Off-duty Dorsai mercenaries, freshly flown in from contra training camps in Honduras, opened ground fire with 9mm folding-stock Uzi submachine guns, silenced Ingram Mac-10s, and Heckler-and-Koch MP5 automatic sidearms, meanwhile shouting a challenge and requesting all inside to identify themselves. They were met with savage return-fire from Czech-made Skorpion automatic pistols and cheap, cruddy, but witheringly effective Soviet-supplied AK47 automatic rifles.

"To our surprise we found that the supposedly 'simple wooden cabin' known as Node Zero had been armored in Kevlar and crammed with dozens of Cuban construction workers. Rescuer casualties mounted, and it became necessary to call in an airstrike.

"Blueprints of the Stealth bomber then strafed the terrorist fortress, followed by blistering orbital fire from X-ray lasers, particle beams, and magnetic rail-guns. This caused the enemies, with all their bad ideas, to vaporize without a trace and should have been done a long time ago."

*Chang Kai producing fog from his mouth*

(Version 2.) "Hello? Am I on the air? Well this is Professor — woops, this is the voice of the Humanist Peace and Justice Coalition, uh, calling.... Well, as everybody knows, we Humanists been putting up with a lot of guff from these cyberpunks, who've been swiping our Nebulas and ridiculing our angst. Then we heard rumors that they'd just called good old Robinson a "no-talent hippydippy arch-wimp." The time had come for a final showdown.

"So we took Connie's, uh, Comrade Tanya's, writing grant, and bought Amtrak tickets for everybody. We met in Austin and had some Campari-and-sodas downtown, then marched on their den of iniquity. And we stood in the alley downstairs and yelled challenges, until the CHEAP TRUTH staff finally heard us over their blaring heavy-metal punk drivel. Then Vince and Sue came out, and stood on the porch upstairs, and yelled abuse, and threatened to grab Nancy and Connie and Karen Joy and dip their braids in the inkwell. And that was followed by a barrage of spitwads and legal-sized paper airplanes with paperclips in the noses that really stung.

"So we had to get tough! First we gave 'em the introduction to PLANET ON THE TABLE, where Stan has the long talk with James Joyce. We could hear 'em vomiting inside, but they fired back with hard-tech expositive lumps from Toffler and Ilya Prigogine. So we hit 'em with both barrels: a chunk of self-reflexive metafiction and some third-hand magic realism.

"They reeled back howling and we rushed upstairs to the door, only to find it barricaded with J.G. Ballard re-issues... That was the last straw, because we know Ballard officially belongs to us.... Our blood was up, and we swarmed into the place, yelling the sacred name of LeGuin and lashing out right and left with our shepherd's crooks....

"Then suddenly Vince slipped on the slick footing of a copy of OMNI and crashed into his massive bank of computers... Big zaps of electricity jumped out of all this Frankenstein equipment which literateurs were not meant to know, and given all the paper, the whole place went up as fast as Shepard's reputation... Sue Denim sneaked out by disguising herself as a progressive feminist writer, and the last thing we heard was Vince screaming, "I meant Spider Robinson, you assholes."

*The Last CHEAP TRUTH Austin, Texas USA The Late Vincent Omniaveritas, editing. Todd "Need a Job" Refinery, graphics. Not copyrighted. "Don't mourn, organize"*

(Version 3) SFAW Grievance Committee Report

"When rumors reached us of Mr. Omniveritas's death, we reacted with grave concern. He had, after all, been semiprofessionally published in INTERZONE, and could be broadly regarded as one of us, even though his name and address never showed in the Directory and we never got cent one of dues out of him. So we despatched a crack investigative team of myopic geeks and pudgy women in satin to clarify the situation. If foul play was discovered, we were perfectly prepared to threaten to sic Harlan's lawyer on any publisher involved.

"Our team travelled to the stated address of the CHEAT TRUTH headquarters, 908 West 12th Street in Austin. We were annoyed, and more than a little angry, to discover that 908 is the address of 'House Park Bar-B-Que,' a working-class Texan eatery that has been in continuous operation since 1943. It was full of rude mundanes in baseball hats and overalls who looked us over and laughed aloud.

"The SFAW have been made the butts of a calculated publicity stunt. We may now assure the membership that there is no such publication as 'CHEAT TRUTH' and definitely no such person as 'Omniveritas.' There is no 'movement' of 'radical hard SF' writers threatening to 'reinvent science fiction from an Eighties perspective.' It was only hype and everyone can relax.

"However, the joke is on the hoaxsters. Although there is no such thing as an actual cyperbunk 'ideology,' the term itself has become a viable subgeneric marketing category. Our sources in publishing assure us that the use of the term 'cyperbunk' in cover blurbs guarantees a modest, but solid sales increase, which may well be useful to younger, less established writers.

"A SFAW member in good standing has prepared a helpful beginners' manual, 'Cyperbunk: What It Means, How To Write It,' which will include a glossary of useful subgenre jargon, such as 'wetware,' 'retrofit,' 'download,' and 'biohazard.' Other chapters will analyze typical cyperbunk plot structures, including tips on how to have the antihero lose the girl in the end without being too downbeat. Younger SFAW members should consult their agents as to whether they too can profit by joining this flashy, but flimsy bandwagon."

INTERVIEW WITH VINCENT OMNIAVERITAS

Saddened by the death of this fabled gangster of Eighties SF criticism, we decided to re-visit the Cross Plains Dairy Queen (see CT3, CT11) and contact his spirit for a post-mortem interview.

To our surprise we found Omniaveritas, apparently very much alive, sipping a Dr. Pepper with his wife, sometime CT graphic artist Sherry LaPuerta. Omniaveritas wore his usual "Captain Harlock — Space Pirate" T-shirt, a black leather bomber jacket, jeans, and Chinese kung fu shoes. Ms. La Puerta wore a maternity jumper and mirrorshades.

CT: Vince! Heard you were dead.

VO: (grunts) Not a scratch on me. CT, though, is definitely history.

CT: How come?

VO: (with a heavy sigh) A lot of reasons, really... First, Sherry and I have a kid on the way.... Yeah, thanks, we're thrilled about it too.... I have a book to do... And we bought a house. I had to change addresses, so it's a proper time to put an honorable end to this phase of operations. We don't want the next 12th Street tenants to be deluged, and possibly mentally harmed, by CT's twisted mail.

CT: Why on earth stop now? When the stuff you've been touting is really taking off?

VO: That's the very reason. I mean, when CHEAP TRUTH was mentioned in ROLLING STONE I knew the end was near. For CT to be cultural currency for those clapped-out yuppie breadheads.... Jesus, what next? The WALL STREET JOURNAL?

CT: But wasn't publicity the point?

VO: The whole point of CHEAP TRUTH was that anyone can do it. All you need is something to say, and a xerox. You don't need a clique or a bankroll or PR flacks. But now I've got crap like that, so I've changed. CT was a garage-band effort and looked it, deliberately. But I'm not a garage-band guy now. I've taught myself how to play, I got my own label and recording studio, I'm even big in Japan. I could lie about it, and pretend I was still really street-level, but it would be bogus. It would betray the whole ethos of the thing. Truth plus lies always equals lies.

Besides, a lot of the original freedom is gone. People know who I am, and they get all hot and bothered by personalities, instead of ideas and issues. CT can no longer claim the "honesty of complete desperation." That first fine flower of red-hot hysteria is simply gone.

CT: You sound bitter about it.

VO: Fuck no, man, the thing did exactly what I wanted it to. It was a successful experiment and had a big pay-off for all concerned. But it has limits. It's too small to get into the really heavy issues, at length. And it's okay as a straight propaganda broadside, but it's not much use as a forum for balanced discussion.

The work has to come first. The publicity can handle itself now. It's already a fucking juggernaut, so I don't see much point in getting out to push. I got better things to do.

CT: So you're saying you've cut a successful niche for yourself, is that it?

VO: The skiffy establishment, such as it is, still doesn't have the foggiest idea what we're up to. They think we're a bunch of PR hustlers, an inch deep, all candy-flake and chrome. They read CT and think, "gosh, what a hip publicity stunt, this year's model, they can't mean it, though." (Pauses, then bursts into sinister laughter)

CT: What about your readers, though?

VO: If they miss what CT offers, let 'em start their own zines. It's easy! Personally, I'm going to read Steve Brown's SF EYE (at Box 3105, Washington DC 20010, $7/yr ($12 overseas)). Brown's a hip guy and will have some good people working with him, including me if truth be told, though I'll be cleaned up, wearing a shirt and tie, and using another name. I have high hopes for this mag, because it's got room and inclination to tackle the real problems of the field. And I'll be reading Scott Card's SHORT FORM (at 546 Lindley Road, Greensboro NC 27410, $10/yr.) Card has no taste at all, he gets all damp-eyed over the most laughably inadequate pulp kitsch, but he's usually good for a hoot... It's good to know there's some Neanderthal out there who has the c-word people figured for effete literateurs.... But for now I'm hanging up my shoes. I did what I wanted and I'm quitting while I'm ahead. Could be THE COMPLEAT CHEAP TRUTH will appear as a retrospective, with a copyright and everything. Oh, and everyone should buy the new Arbor House collection, MIRRORSHADES: The Cyberpunk Anthology ($16.95). It's a solid memento of the scene and has the best single summary of Movement ideology.

Someday I may try another zine. But CT's too big now and people lean on it too much. I wanted to point at the mountaintop, I don't want to be the mountain myself.

CT: I guess I see... Any final words?

VO: I hereby declare the revolution over. Long live the provisional government.

CT: Same old Vince... Goodbye all.